

**DETAILED ACTION**

1. The Examiner acknowledges the amendments to claims 7 and 9.

***Claim Objections***

2. Claim 7 is objected to because of the following informalities: Claim 9 has been amended to claim "wherein the covering flange on both sides of the at least one clamping web has a contact surface for areal support on a floor cover segment". Claim 7 depends from claim 9 and also includes the limitation " the covering flange on both sides of the at least one clamping web has a contact surface for areal support on a floor cover segment". The amendment to claim 7 also includes limitations that are present in claim 9. Appropriate correction is required to remove these duplicate limitations.

***Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 112***

3. Claims 7 and 9 rejected under 35 U.S.C. 112, first paragraph, as failing to comply with the written description requirement. The claim(s) contains subject matter which was not described in the specification in such a way as to reasonably convey to one skilled in the relevant art that the inventor(s), at the time the application was filed, had possession of the claimed invention. These claims have been amended to include the term "areal" but this term is not found in the specification and is new matter. Areal has a wide variety of meanings and it is unknown which meaning is implied since it is absent from the specification.

***Allowable Subject Matter***

4. Claims 5 and 6 are objected to as being dependent upon a rejected base claim, but would be allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims.
5. The following is a statement of reasons for the indication of allowable subject matter: Stanchfield teaches in Figure 18, that the compensating strip has a peripheral projection but the projection is retained by the clamping web and not the underside of the covering flange. Furthermore, the peripheral projection of Stanchfield is square which would not allow the compensating strip to pivot.

***Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103***

6. The following is a quotation of 35 U.S.C. 103(a) which forms the basis for all obviousness rejections set forth in this Office action:

(a) A patent may not be obtained though the invention is not identically disclosed or described as set forth in section 102 of this title, if the differences between the subject matter sought to be patented and the prior art are such that the subject matter as a whole would have been obvious at the time the invention was made to a person having ordinary skill in the art to which said subject matter pertains. Patentability shall not be negated by the manner in which the invention was made.

7. Claims 7-9 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Stanchfield, US Patent # 6,860,074.

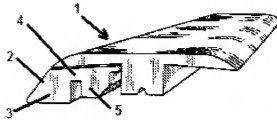
Regarding claim 9, Stanchfield teaches a covering device for joints in panels such as floor panels (Abstract). Stanchfield teaches that the cover can be made of plastic based products, such as PVC (Column 4, Lines 50-51). These types of materials are commonly formed by extruding them through a machine to create the desired profile. Stanchfield teaches, in Figure 2, a clamping web (16) that protrudes downward from the covering flange (12) and extends in a longitudinal direction

along the cover. The clamping web (16) is used to secure the cover by inserting it into the clamp (26). Stanchfield also teaches a compensating strip (40) on the underside of the covering flange that engages the covering flange with a tongue and groove mechanism (18). Stanchfield also teaches, in Figure 2, that the floor covering (12) is flat over the floor (24 and 25) of which it covers. Stanchfield teaches, in Figure 2, that the tongue (18) is on the covering device and the groove (42) is on the compensating strip (40) as seen in Figure 3. Stanchfield discloses the claimed inventions except for the tongue and groove mechanisms are reversed. It would have been obvious to one having ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention was made to make the cover with the groove and the compensating strip with the lug, since it has been held that a mere reversal of the essential working parts of a device involves only routine skill in the art *In re Einstein*, 8 USPQ 167. With the reversal of the tongue and groove mechanisms, the cover would be suitable for use without a compensating strip between two floors coverings having the same height. Furthermore, Stanchfield shows in Figure 2, that one side of the cover is resting on a floor (24) without a compensation strip, thus giving the covering flange (12) a contact surface for "areal" support on the floor cover segment (24). Therefore, the invention as a whole would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention.

Regarding claims 7 and 8, the applicant should note, regarding the recitation of method claims that depend from product claims, that even though product-by-process

claims are limited by and defined by the process, determination of patentability is based on the product itself. The patentability of a product does not depend on its method of production. If the product in the product-by-process claim is the same as or obvious from a product of the prior art, the claim is unpatentable even though the prior product was made by a different process.

8. Claims 2 and 3 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Stanchfield, US Patent # 6,860,074 in view of Neuhofer, US Design Patent # D542,941. Regarding claim 2, Stanchfield teaches a covering device with a compensating strip that has a tongue and groove connecting mechanism but does not teach the compensating strip has two legs. However, Neuhofer teaches in the annotated figure below, a covering device (1) with a compensating strip (2) that has a basic form of an angle and two legs (3 and 4). In combination with Stanchfield, leg (4) would have the tongue and groove mechanism on it. Furthermore, it can be seen that the compensating strip (2) makes an extension of the cover (1) extending downward. One of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention would have been motivated to have a compensating strip with two legs because the legs form a continuation of the covering device that creates a smooth even flowing cover over a gap between panels. Therefore, the invention as a whole would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention.



Regarding claim 3, Stanchfield teaches a compensating strip but does not teach a supporting leg connected to the leg that has the tongue and groove mechanism. However, Neuhofer teaches in the annotated figure above, that the compensating strip (2) has a supporting leg (5) projecting from leg (4). In combination with Stanchfield, leg (4) would have the tongue and groove mechanism on it. One of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention would have been motivated to further include a supporting leg because a groove between the supporting leg and other leg can be used to secure the compensating strip securely. Therefore, the invention as a whole would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention.

9. Claim 4 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Stanchfield, US Patent # 6,860,074 in view of Neuhofer, US Design Patent # D542,941 in further view of Kemper, US Patent # 6,345,480.

Regarding claim 4, Stanchfield in view of Neuhofer teach a cover device that has a supporting leg on the compensating strip. It can be seen in Figure 1 of Neuhofer that there is a channel between the legs that is capable of accepting a fixture from the profile cover but Stanchfield only teaches one securing means (26) on the fixture. However, Kemper teaches the use of two securing means (6 and 12)

on the fixture (3). One of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention would have been motivated to include two or more securing means on the floor mounting plate fixture in order to secure not only the covering device but also the compensating strip to the floor. Therefore, the invention as a whole would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention.

### ***Response to Arguments***

10. Applicant's arguments have been fully considered but they are not persuasive.

The Applicant's Attorney continues to argue against the case law found *In re Einstein* where it was decided that "a mere reversal of the essential working parts of a device only involves routine skill in the art". The Examiner traverses the Applicant's Attorney based on the reason that the decision comes from case law. The reason for the reversal of parts does not need to be found in the reference cited.

The next argument is again toward the case law of *In re Einstein* where Stanchfield and all the cited art teach away from placing a groove in the cover because the groove would weaken the cover and the fact that the Applicant's invention produces unexpected results. However, there is nothing structurally about the cover that would make it less susceptible to breaking because of the groove in it. The Applicant's Attorney has stated that nobody has put the groove in the cover because it would weaken it. However, that means that putting the groove in the cover has been considered before. Furthermore, the specification states in the description of the prior art that the previous covers could be placed against the

floor without a compensating strip but the extra material of the tongue would need to be removed. That being said, reversing the tongue and groove is a design choice that was considered in the past but was not used due to the weakening of the cover. During it's consideration it was recognized that it would be advantageous to have the cover flat so it could be placed on the floor without the tongue in the way. But in order to create a stronger cover, designers would not place the groove in the cover and if it were needed to rest flat on the floor, the tongue would be removed. Furthermore, the claims are claiming the combination of the cover and the compensation strip, not the cover and the floor without the compensation strip. Finally, there is nothing structurally, once the case law of *In re Einstein* is taken into consideration that would prevent the cover element from resting on the floor in an "areal" manner.

The Applicant is reminded that the Examiner has indicated allowable subject matter in claims 5 and 6 and the application would be allowable if these limitations were added into the independent claim.

### ***Conclusion***

Any inquiry concerning this communication or earlier communications from the examiner should be directed to Andrew J. Triggs whose telephone number is 571-270-3657. The examiner can normally be reached on Monday through Thursday 6:30am - 5:00pm EST.

If attempts to reach the examiner by telephone are unsuccessful, the examiner's supervisor, Richard E. Chilcot can be reached on 571-272-6777. The fax phone

number for the organization where this application or proceeding is assigned is 571-273-8300.

Information regarding the status of an application may be obtained from the Patent Application Information Retrieval (PAIR) system. Status information for published applications may be obtained from either Private PAIR or Public PAIR. Status information for unpublished applications is available through Private PAIR only. For more information about the PAIR system, see <http://pair-direct.uspto.gov>. Should you have questions on access to the Private PAIR system, contact the Electronic Business Center (EBC) at 866-217-9197 (toll-free). If you would like assistance from a USPTO Customer Service Representative or access to the automated information system, call 800-786-9199 (IN USA OR CANADA) or 571-272-1000.

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